

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-25 NEA-14 EB-11 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03

SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 AID-20 /167 W

----- 070050

R 012130Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9647

INFO DIA WASH DC

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY LIMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 04569

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CI, PE, MILI

SUBJ: REACTION TO PERUVIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY MILITARY DISPLAY

REF: SANTIAGO 4507

1. SUMMARY. DISPLAY OF PERUVIAN MILITARY MIGHT, ESPECIALLY SOVIET WEAPONS, PROVOKES EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN IN PRESS AND RESTATEMENT BY GOC SPOKESMAN INDICATING GOC RESERVE TOWARD PRES. VELASCO'S ARMS FREEZE PROPOSAL. CHILEAN MILITARY REMAIN DEEPLY CONCERNED AND ARE ESTABLISHING BEST DEFENSE POSTURE POSSIBLE. END SUMMARY.

2. AS REPORTED REFTEL SANTIAGO PRESS AND TV NEWS FEATURED MILITARY DISPLAYS CONNECTED WITH CELEBRATION OF PERU'S INDEPENDENCE. NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS HAVE TAKEN "MORE IN SORROW THAN IN ANGER" APPROACH AND CITED RUINOUS ECONOMIC COST OF MODERN WEAPONS, DANGER OF SOVIET ARMS PROVOKING IN SOUTH AMERICA THE SUFFERINGS WHICH HAVE BEEN THEIR COST IN MIDDLE EAST, AND LACK OF ANY CONFLICT SITUATION WHICH JUSTIFIES ACQUISITION OF T-55'S AND SAMS. PEACE OF AREA IS ENSURED BY TREATIES GUARANTEEING FRONTIERS AND REGULATION RELATIONS, ACCORDING TO EDITORIAL IN LEADING "EL MERCURIO."

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3. PRESENCE OF CUBAN DEF MIN RAUL CASTRO SEEN BY MERCURIO AS CLEAR INDICATION THAT TRANSFER OF (SOVIET) WEAPONS AND MILITARY TECHNOLOGY WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY CUBA AS INTERMEDIARY. MERCURIO SUGGESTS POSSIBILITY OF RISE OF "CASTROITE POLITICAL LINK" AS RESULT OF SUPPLY OF ARMS.

4. AUGUST 1 PRESS CARRIED INTERVIEW COMMENTS FROM GOC PRESS SPOKESMAN WILLOUGHBY IN RESPONSE TO PERUVIAN DISPLAY. WILLOUGHBY SAID GOC HAD DEMONSTRATED SINCERE INTEREST IN VELASCO ARMS FREEZE PROPOSAL, BUT "NATURALLY" THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PROPOSAL IS MATTER FOR VELASCO ALONE, AS GOC CANNOT AND WILL NOT INTERFERE IN PERUVIAN AFFAIRS.

5. WILLOUGHBY ADDED THAT MORE IMPORTANT THAN ARMS IS SOLID INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF A COUNTRY, WITH HEALTHY ECONOMY AND A JUST SOCIETY.

6. RECALLING THAT AREA FON MINS ARE TO MEET IN BUENOS AIRES IN LATE AUGUST TO DISCUSS PRESIDENTIAL SUMMIT MEETING IN LIMA IN DECEMBER ON OCCASION CELEBRATION AYACUCHO BATTLE, WILLOUGHBY REEXPRESSED GEN. PINOCHET'S CONTINUING INTEREST IN REDUCING ARMS COSTS AND HIS INTERCHANGE OF OPINIONS BY PERSONAL LETTER WITH PRES. VELASCO.

7. COMMENT. DISPLAY OF PERUVIAN MILITARY MIGHT OBVIOUSLY HAS REINFORCED GOC AND GENERAL CHILEAN CONCERN OVER PERUVIAN INTENTIONS, ALTHOUGH WILLOUGHBY'S POINTED STATEMENT CONTAINS NOTHING NEW. DURING VISIT TO NORTHERN CHILE LATTER HALF JULY EMBOFF WAS TOLD BY LOCAL MILITARY COMMANDER IN ARICA AND BY GEN. FORESTIER, NORTHERN REGIONAL COMMANDER BASED IN IQUIQUE, THAT PERUVIAN "THREAT" IS TAKEN VERY SERIOUSLY. BOTH COMMANDERS ADMITTED FREELY THAT STOPPING PERUVIAN ATTACK SHORT OF QUEBRADA DE CAMERONES (DEEP CANYON SOUTH OF ARICA) PROBABLY IMPOSSIBLE, BUT SWORE EVERY CHILEAN SOLDIER WOULD FIGHT TO DEATH WITH KNIFE OR ROCKS IF NECESSARY. FULL-SIZE SILHOUETTES OF T-55'S WITH ANTI-TANK AIMING POINTS INDICATED WERE OBSERVED IN CUARTEL IN ARICA, AND GEN. FORESTIER SAID HE IS MOVING PART OF HIS DIVISION UP FROM IQUIQUE TO NEW INSTALLATION BEING CONSTRUCTED NEAR INTERSECTION IQUIQUE ACCESS ROAD WITH PANAMERICAN HIGHWAY.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, JUNTA, ARMED FORCES, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION, NEWSPAPERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 AUG 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: boyleja
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974SANTIA04569
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740210-0228
From: SANTIAGO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740882/aaaacsij.tel
Line Count: 107
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: SANTIAGO 4507
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: boyleja
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 SEP 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 SEP 2002 by WorrelSW>; APPROVED <20 FEB 2003 by boyleja>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REACTION TO PERUVIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY MILITARY DISPLAY
TAGS: PFOR, MILI, CI, PE
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005